

22D MEU (SOC) Back to Sea

Since my last update, the Marines and Sailors of the 22d MEU (SOC) have continued to operate aboard the ships of the Kearsarge Strike Group. We have remained busy with operational tasks, training, and a little shipboard fun.

As most of you probably know, elements of the 22d MEU (SOC) aboard Kearsarge provided humanitarian assistance to the people of Bangladesh after Tropical Cyclone Sidr ripped through the country, killing more than 3,000 and destroying thousands of homes. We were called upon by the Government of Bangladesh to help distribute water and food, and to provide medical care after the storm.

On Nov. 16, we were ordered to head east and to be ready if Bangladesh asked for our help. By the time we arrived in the Bay of Bengal on Nov. 23, our assistance had been officially requested and we flew in the first shipment of water to Barisal Airfield. At that time, there was already a significant effort underway to provide relief to those affected by the storm. Relief agencies from around the world were on the ground, and supplies were flowing into the area and were being staged at distribution hubs.

Because many of the areas affected by the cyclone were separated by the complicated landscape of the immense delta region formed by the Ganges and Jamuna Rivers, delivering aid over land was difficult. It was clear that our helicopters and surface craft would be extremely important to relief efforts.

After the initial delivery of water on Nov. 23, our helicopters began delivering more significant aid on Nov. 26 and eventually moved 14,000 gallons of water and 205,000 lbs. of food products, medical supplies and other relief material. The heavy and medium-lift helicopters from HMM-261 (Rein.) flew more than 80 sorties and 331 hours in support of the relief operations. Two medical teams additionally composed of 22nd MEU and Kearsarge Sailors provided care to nearly 1,600 patients and dispensed 2,000 prescriptions from a mobile pharmacy.

Our relief operations made a difference to the people of Bangladesh. Everywhere we went, our Marines and Sailors were greeted by waves and smiles. The Marines and Sailors worked hard and long hours to make this operation a success. The mission was executed professionally and safely, and I could not be more satisfied with the job of our Blue/Green Team.

To learn more about the relief operations, go to www.22meu.usmc.mil. Our photographers and videographers did a great job capturing the day-to-day events, and you can view hundreds of photos and several videos, listen to audio interviews, or read stories written about the relief operations.

USS Gunston Hall and USS Ponce remain in US Central Command's area of operations. Gunston Hall was recently in port at the Seychelles, a small island paradise located off the east coast of Africa, where they were afforded the opportunity to enjoy the ambiance of the island life, with all its wonderful customs, cuisine, and scenic places to visit. All reports indicate that your Marines and Sailors aboard the Gunston Hall had a great time!

Gunston Hall recently completed a Corporals' Course much like the two classes we held aboard the Kearsarge. The commitment by our senior enlisted and staff noncommissioned officers to train your Marines to be better leaders is noteworthy. The graduates of every class return to their units bringing with them the rich lessons learned from their instructors. Their contribution will help the MEU to become a stronger and more efficient organization in the service of our nation. I truly appreciate their hard work.

The Marines and Sailors aboard Ponce also have been working diligently in the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR). They recently supported the Dubai Air Show from the Arabian Gulf, acting as a crisis response force for the third largest air show in the world. Thankfully, there was no crisis, but the planning and preparation for support was well executed by the team aboard Ponce. They have been doing an exceptional job rising to the occasion of every task assigned to them, and most recently were rewarded with a four-day port visit to Jebel Ali in the United Arab Emirates.

You should by now have noticed that email restrictions have been lifted, and you are once again receiving those frequent messages from loved ones. We appreciate your patience and understanding as we operate abroad, where sometimes luxuries like email and phones must be restricted to ensure operational security. It is a burden for all of us, but it helps ensure the safety of your Marine or Sailor and the ships upon which they sail.

Thanksgiving afforded our Marines and Sailors an opportunity to eat a hearty meal at sea, along with some at-sea fun activities which helped to lessen the pain of missing family and friends. Many care packages arrived over the past week or two, with cards and letters that helped bring a little taste of home to the ship for the holiday. I encourage you to keep the packages and letters coming, as they really have a positive effect on morale. Many around the ship also decorated their work and living spaces with ornaments and festive colors reflective of the season of Thanksgiving, played board games, watched movies, and took some time for a little rest and relaxation. Know that during these holidays we are thinking about you at home and the support you have given us throughout the deployment. You are missed, but take comfort in knowing that we will be home before you know it!

KEEPING INFORMED

Please remember, this web remains your best source of information on 22d MEU (SOC) activities. It will be updated regularly with stories and photographs of your Marines and Sailors.

You can also access our 24-hour hotline by calling 1-877-817-7322 (toll-free) or 910-451-8780 (Jacksonville, N.C. area) and pressing the number '4' at the prompt.

All official and factual information regarding the 22d MEU (SOC)'s movements, activities, and operations will come directly from me via this web site (www.usmc.mil/22ndmeu/), the MEU hotline, or the Key Volunteer Network. Other sources of information may be incorrect.

As always, we appreciate the sacrifice you make for us on a daily basis. I extend my warmest regards to you and yours. Semper Fidelis, and God bless all of you.

Sincerely,

Douglas M. Stilwell
Colonel, USMC
Commanding Officer